

MIDDLE GRADES...ON THE MOVE!

SUPPORTING THE SUCCESS OF YOUNG ADOLESCENTS

**New Jersey Department of Education
Office of District and School Improvement Services**

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Welcome to the first edition of **Middle Grades...On the Move!** So much is happening in the world of middle level education and we want to share it with you. This newsletter will feature articles written by New Jersey middle grades experts and showcase the exciting things happening in New Jersey's schools. Young adolescents have special needs and so do the adults who work with them—so join us by reading and sharing Middle Grades...On the Move!

Month of the Young Adolescent

October is the Month of the Young Adolescent, an annual international collaborative effort of education, health, and youth-oriented organizations. Initiated by National Middle School Association (NMSA), Month of the Young Adolescent brings together a wide range of organizations to focus on the needs of this important age range, ages 10 to 15. According to the NMSA, (www.nmsa.org) key messages for the celebration are:

- The importance of parents being knowledgeable about young adolescents and being actively involved in their lives;
- The understanding that healthy bodies plus healthy minds equal healthy young adolescents;
- The realization that the education young adolescents experience during this formative period of life will, in large measure, determine the future for all citizens; and
- The knowledge that every young adolescent should have the opportunity to pursue his or her dreams and aspirations, and post-secondary education should be a possibility for all.

New Jersey Schools to Watch (NJSTW)[®]: Growing, Learning and Succeeding!

The New Jersey Schools to Watch[®]: Growing, Learning and Succeeding program recognizes middle grades schools that focus on academic rigor for all, developmentally-appropriate practices, and social equity supported by strong leadership, policies, and practices that lead to improved student achievement. Any school with grades 6, 7, and/or 8 is eligible to apply for designation. The NJSTW program is a partnership between the New Jersey Department of Education and the New Jersey Consortium for Middle Schools at Kean University.

In 2008, three New Jersey schools were designated: Ocean City Intermediate School, Mountain View Middle School in Mendham Borough, and Maurice River Township Elementary School. For more information on the NJSTW program and these three schools, go to: <http://www.nj.gov/education/dsis/stw/hpmgs.htm>.

The NJSTW process begins with an application (due October 15, 2008) which is carefully reviewed by a team of educators. A small number of schools enter phase two which consists of a full-day site visit and a series of interviews. Designated schools are notified in late February and honored at a State Board of Education meeting in March. Designated schools become part of a national network affiliated with the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform.

In April, the schools were honored at the New Jersey Middle School Association Conference and at a dinner held at Kean University. Each school held its own NJSTW celebration featuring school and community leaders, student performances, and of course, fun and food! Then the three 2008 designated schools were off to the national Schools to Watch Conference in Washington, DC on June 18-21, 2008 where they jointly presented a workshop “Three Paths to Excellence: Scheduling for Success!” Participants also visited Capitol Hill where they were able to speak about the Success in the Middle Act and other issues of concern for middle level educators. During the conference, the three schools were honored at the gala dinner and awards ceremony. It was a wonderful end to an exciting school year and the beginning of a unique “ambassadorship” for the three schools. As New Jersey’s first Schools to Watch, they are expected to present at state conferences and host site visits to their schools to share their innovation and success.



Teacher Spotlight: An Interview with John Kline, 2007-2008 New Jersey Teacher of the Year

John Kline, a middle grades social studies teacher in the Norwood School District in Bergen County, served as a site team member for the 2008 New Jersey Schools to Watch Program and serves as the NJSTW liaison for the executive board of the New Jersey Middle School Association (NJMSA). He is an innovative and creative teacher with a special place in his heart for middle level students.

What factors influenced you to become a teacher?

Childhood forged in me traits important to teaching: imagination, tolerance, and collaboration. As the eldest of six children, I did not choose to be a teacher; nature chose me to teach. My father's job often kept him away much of the week while my mother was too busy running a household to assist with schoolwork. The responsibility of educating my brothers and sisters fell to me. Reflecting back, being raised in a shore community provided insightful experiences affecting my classroom practices today. Perhaps reading stories to my siblings, or more likely filleting a fish or baiting crab traps, convinced me that children learn best by engaging in creative, meaningful activities. As an educator, I try to immerse my students daily in purposeful, imaginative lessons. During any lesson a winter coat may become an Inuit sealskin jacket, a life vest, or space suit. I encourage my students to recreate living in the past.

What do you consider your greatest contributions and accomplishments in education?

I always loved history. After completing college, I entered graduate school and began substitute teaching. I found the classroom far more exciting than sitting in a historical society special collections library. I quickly realized my calling: to teach at the zenith between student energy and my subject—middle school. Adolescents energize classrooms, creating a “learning frenzy” if properly channeled. A principal pointed out that I had a “knack for reaching the toughest kids.” Two of my brothers struggled in school but possessed “hands on” construction skills. In their honor, I provide a variety of assessments, explaining to the students “there is more than one way to skin an eel.” Effective teaching does not occur in a vacuum; it is the collective effort of students, parents and families, teachers, the administration, and community leaders. My greatest contribution as a teacher has been designing and implementing cross-curricular programs and lessons with my colleagues. For example, students performed statistical analyses of census records, rewrote the Star Spangled Banner, researched historical sources for abbreviations on the Periodic Table, and practiced Spanish while studying the Mexican War. In preparation for the annual field trip, eighth grade students regard my 100 Questions for Washington, DC as a rite of passage. In fact, I often receive fresh questions suggested by past graduates. The art teacher and I designed a scavenger hunt for seventh grade students taking a trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Students analyzed the art

of the American Revolution and later constructed puzzles to solve the mysteries of Darwin for the Museum of Natural History. Our team coordinated a visit to the King Tut Exhibition with one to the Philadelphia Constitution Center. I believe teamwork is at the heart of teaching.

Becoming New Jersey's Teacher of the Year pales in comparison to the excitement of seventh graders racing to find the anachronisms in Washington Crossing the Delaware or the drama of eighth graders weeping as a Holocaust survivor recounts her days at Auschwitz. An elderly grandmother thanked me after watching a PowerPoint created by her grandson in which he proudly retold the story of his great grandfather's trials on his journey from Italy, and his grueling construction work on the Empire State Building. "Thank you" she said. "Before this project my grandson thought I knew nothing about nothing. Now he wants to listen to my old stories and *he* asks *me* questions." Creating such inspirational moments remains my greatest accomplishment.

Teachers teach because they care. Teaching young people is what they do best. It requires long hours, patience, and care.

--Horace Mann



**John Kline
Norwood Social Studies Teacher
New Jersey State Teacher of the Year**

Sustainable transformations follow a predictable pattern of buildup and breakthrough. Like pushing on a giant, heavy flywheel, it takes a lot of effort to get the thing moving at all, but with persistent pushing in a consistent direction over a long period of time, the flywheel builds momentum, eventually hitting a point of breakthrough.
From Good to Great, p. 186.

School Spotlight: Ocean City Intermediate School - A New Jersey School to Watch



The Ocean City Intermediate School (OCIS) was one of three schools selected as a 2008 New Jersey School to Watch. Here's what makes OCIS a special place for young adolescents to grow, learn, and succeed!

From the minute you enter the Ocean City Intermediate School, you know you are in a place where children come first and everyone is excited about learning. Principal Dr. Pamela Vaughan introduced the students and staff of OCIS to the FISH! Philosophy®: *be there for others, play and have fun, make someone's day, and choose your attitude.* This management system, created by John Christensen, supports a school culture that includes a strong character education program as well as a rigorous academic program that challenges and supports all students. There are many opportunities for student engagement and enrichment through clubs, sports, and community service, including the weekly meeting of the peanut butter and jelly club that prepares sandwiches for a local homeless shelter. All sixth grade students participate in swimming instruction at the community center as part of physical education and the school uses the town's library for author's visits and special events.

Creative scheduling makes OCIS unique. The school day is organized into 15-minute mods which can be combined to provide classes of varying duration based on student and teacher needs. This flexible schedule, and the teaming that supports it, allows teachers to plan interdisciplinary lessons and to conduct extended labs, project work, and debates. As a professional learning community, teachers regularly meet to discuss how best to use the time and how to work together to ensure that all students are learning. The school also features the Acceleration Program, designed to pre-teach students who need assistance rather than remediate. Acceleration teachers work with classroom teachers to modify lessons and assessments and provide students with background knowledge that helps them better prepare for instruction in an inclusive setting.

The students at OCIS are certainly growing, learning and succeeding! For more information about the school or the New Jersey Schools to Watch program, please go to <http://www.nj.gov/education/dsis/stw/>.



Parent's Corner: Answering Tough Questions from Your Young Adolescent

Parents and other family members are integral parts of student achievement. The Schools to Watch Program describes parents and family members as partners in making sure that students succeed. In *This We Believe in Action*, noted expert Joyce Epstein writes that there are six types of involvement that helps schools establish full and productive programs of school-family-community partnerships: parenting; communicating; volunteering; learning at home; decision making; and collaborating with the community.

Helping families understand young adolescent development and acquiring parenting skills for this age group is critical. Nora Gelperin, director of training and education for Answer, part of the Center for Applied Psychology at Rutgers University, responds to two questions frequently posed by parents and family members about the transition to middle grades and the wide range of developmental stages of young adolescents.

My child is going to middle school this year and I am petrified! How do you have a conversation about sex and other equally difficult topics when your child still believes in Santa and the tooth fairy?

Talking with your child about your family's values and beliefs is critically important to his/her healthy development, although not an easy task. Pop culture is rich with "teachable moments" - teen celebrities becoming pregnant, sexualized advertisements and even the Presidential election. Families can use these moments to broach a variety of topics with their kids. Finding ways to talk about these subjects without the pressure of looking each other in the eyes can help. Try talking when riding in the car, e-mailing each other, or while sharing an activity together. Additionally, asking questions about what other pre-teens the same age as your child think, versus specifically what your child thinks, can help lessen the possible defensive response of, "You just don't understand." Lastly, make sure to do equal parts listening as talking, since kids generally are eager to help educate their parents about what it's "really like" these days. However, kids are also hungry to hear what their parents think about a host of difficult situations and topics. Above all, don't wait for your child to bring up these subjects as often he/she is looking to you to start the conversation.

My child seems very young to be going to school with kids who are four years older and a whole lot more "worldly." I want my child to feel normal but I'm not sure I know

what “normal” really is. How can I help my child transition to the middle school where so many of the kids have already gone through puberty, are dating, and maybe even having sex?

Supporting your child through a substantial transition, such as entering middle school, is very important. This is a time of great uncertainty for children as typically they are being introduced to a new social environment that can be more complex than elementary school. Additionally, their development during these years places additional importance on “fitting in” and being accepted by peers. It can be healthy for kids to realize that not all kids do anything all at the same time and this includes puberty, dating and initiating sexual behaviors. In fact, most kids entering sixth grade have not done any of those three things, save for a few girls who might have begun menstruating. Most pre-teens crave to know that their experience is normal and that message coming from parents can be very reassuring. Additionally, helping children understand that even though they might feel very different from other kids their age, generally most kids develop at their own pace and their stage of development is most likely, perfectly normal. Lastly, parents should keep in mind that despite rumors to the contrary, less than half of all high school students report engaging in sexual intercourse, which means more than half have not. Parents should try to be mindful of what they want for their child's sexual development and not focus solely on what they're afraid could happen. Stress the positive, not just the negative. Listen first and talk early and often.

Keeping Students Healthy!

As an advocate of coordinated school health programming, the National Middle School Association provides resources to schools and communities in their efforts to develop healthy, productive, and ethical citizens.

Campaign for School Wellness

A new report, *A Mission Becomes a Mandate: Campaign for School Wellness*, kicks off the Action for Healthy Kids *Campaign for School Wellness*. *Campaign for School Wellness* assists schools, parents, and communities in effectively implementing, tracking, and strengthening their wellness policies and practices. www.afhk.org

Preteen Vaccination Campaign

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has launched a campaign to encourage a routine health checkup for 11-and 12-year-olds and to make sure these young people are vaccinated against serious, sometimes life-threatening diseases such as meningitis, tetanus, diphtheria, whooping cough, and cervical cancer. <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/spec-grps/preteens-adol/07gallery/default.htm#press>

Free Health Planning Resources for Schools

The Healthy Schools Program, an initiative of the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, provides tools and solutions to help schools create healthier school environments by promoting nutrition and physical activity to students and teachers. Any school can register

online and gain access to the resources, free of charge.

<http://www.healthiergeneration.org/>



**Academic
Excellence:
Rigorous
Standards for
All Students**

In 1996, the State Board of Education adopted the first New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS). Local school districts are required to align curricula with the NJCCCS, which were revised and readopted in 2004. These standards define what is a “Thorough and Efficient Education” under the State’s Constitution and are used as the basis for the state assessment and accountability system.

The Schools to Watch program states that high-performing middle grades schools offer high-quality classes that challenge all students to use their minds well. All students are expected to meet high academic standards. Instruction must move from coverage of content to more substantive issues and skills. In *This We Believe*, the National Middle School Association (NMSA) states that an integrative curriculum helps students make meaningful decisions about learning, often defying “arbitrary subject boundaries.” Further, NMSA states that a rich middle level program also enables students to investigate “beyond their immediate realm” regardless of social class, gender, ethnicity or life circumstances. Students become engaged and empowered as they envision possibilities rather than limitations. The challenge for middle level educators is this: What standards do my students need to meet? How can I help my students achieve the standards?

The Standards Clarification Project is an attempt to provide an answer to those questions by making explicit the content and skills that are the primary focus of teaching, learning and assessment in the current New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (2004). The project provides materials in each of the nine content areas that convey an understanding of how to capture those priorities in designing local curriculum and assessments, as well as in managing local instruction across content areas. This becomes increasingly important as we continue to hold students, teachers, schools, and districts accountable under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC). Additionally, the state’s movement towards increased rigor for all high school students makes it imperative that middle grades schools engage young

adolescents in an equally rigorous program that is authentic, thoughtful, reflective, and challenging—one that prepares all students for high school and beyond.

Priorities have been identified in the NJCCCS within and across cumulative progress indicators to answer the question “What is most important?” Based on the Understanding by Design (UBD) work of Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, the priorities have been framed as big ideas, enduring understandings, and essential questions. As such, critical content, or the “heart” of the subject, becomes transparent for teachers and students and provides an organizing structure for meaningful and connected learning, as well as opportunities for transfer of learning to other subject areas and real-life situations. For young adolescents, the use of skills and knowledge in real-world settings and situations is critical. Middle grades students need to link their education to the future and to the community. The Standards Clarification Project is designed to assist educators to emphasize depth over breadth and to make connections across content areas.

These materials may be accessed at <http://www.nj.gov/education/aps/>. They have also been provided to assessment vendors who will use them to shape item development on state assessments. Content areas in the state assessment program for **Grades 5-8** contain additional guidance framed as **Areas of Focus** for the state assessment. Areas of Focus include comments about certain Cumulative Progress Indicators (CPIs), exemplars of how cumulative progress indicators may be assessed on state assessments and locally, and in some cases, instructional strategies and assessment strategies. These materials may also be accessed at <http://www.nj.gov/education/aps/>.

In the year ahead, the Office of Academic Standards will continue to develop additional materials to help educators focus on what is key, critical, relevant, and rigorous. Stay tuned!

Thanks to Janis Jensen, Office of Academic Standards, for contributing to this article.

Did you know that New Jersey Schools to Watch are academically excellent?

- ✓ *All students are expected to meet high academic standards.*
- ✓ *Curriculum, instruction, assessment, and appropriate academic interventions are aligned with high standards.*
- ✓ *The curriculum emphasizes deep understanding of important concepts and the development of essential skills.*
- ✓ *Instructional strategies include a variety of challenging and engaging activities that are clearly related to the grade-level standards, concepts, and skills being taught.*
- ✓ *Teachers use a variety of methods to assess and monitor student progress.*
- ✓ *The schedule provides students with time to meet rigorous standards.*
- ✓ *Students are provided with the support they need to achieve.*
- ✓ *The adults in the school are provided time to work with colleagues to deepen their knowledge and improve instructional practices.*



Developmental Responsiveness: Let's Get Personal - Student Advisory Programs

In the book *What Every Middle School Teacher Should Know*, Dave Brown and Trudy Knowles discuss the need for a more personalized and developmentally responsive environment for young adolescents. They conclude that “The heart of a successful advisory program is the development of a trustful, caring community in which students perceive their advisors as demonstrating unconditional support for their growth.” Following this theme, New Jersey’s own Mr. J. Thomas Kane, Past President of the New Jersey Middle School Association, spoke at the Newark Public Schools’ middle grades conference. His workshop, entitled “50 Great Advisory Ideas,” focused on the importance of an Advisory Program as a key element of personalization. Mr. Kane told the participants: ***“If we lose them at 10 to 14, we might just never get them back.”***

Why should you consider an advisory program for your school?

An advisory program dedicates time to respond to the needs of early adolescents. It helps to ensure that not one student falls through the cracks. Advisory time should not be viewed simply as a curriculum to be covered; rather, it should be appreciated as an opportunity to conduct relational work with students. *Breaking Ranks in the Middle* describes advisory as “... frequent and meaningful opportunities to meet with an adult to plan and assess academic, personal, and social development.” Advisory programs are not extended homeroom periods where students listen to announcements and teachers distribute paperwork. Generally, an advisory program works best when it is grade-level based and part of an interdisciplinary team approach. Michael Fallon, a New Jersey presenter of character education programs, states that, “Every student should have one significant adult in their life inside of their school.” A successful advisory program provides students with an opportunity to discuss issues and questions that are relevant to their personal lives. Advisory has been described as a student’s “home away from home,” a place where students can seek information, guidance, support, and acceptance.

Successful advisory programs:

- Meet for an extended period of time (20-25 minutes) once a week and for at least for 10-15 minutes daily at the start of the school day;
- May include a school-wide monthly advisory theme that helps guide teachers in the selection of appropriate activities;

- Include topics such as character education, career education, and goal-setting;
- May include team-building, collaborative problem-solving, and leadership activities;
- Focus on service learning projects; and
- Support student growth and serve as a means to identify and prevent problems.

George DiBouno, the New Jersey Consortium Middle Schools Middle Level Educator of the Year, challenged his advisory students with an activity entitled, “Make it Grow.” Students implemented a fundraising project, beginning with \$5.00 of seed money. During advisory, students utilized persuasive skills to convince their peers to donate the entire classes’ grand total to their selected charity. As a result of this activity, the “Make It Grow,” project raised \$2,000. This activity required students to work cooperatively, sharpen their communication skills, and improve their knowledge of financial literacy. Activities such as this one do not require extensive planning, which is often a fear of middle level educators embarking on new advisory programs.

Middle grades administrators must also champion advisory through purposeful planning. Faculty meetings can be used to model effective advisory practices so teachers see a personal investment in the program. Teachers often fear that their lack of training makes them ill-prepared for the role as an advisor. Professional development and on going support is critical for the success of an advisory program. Teaming novice educators/advisors with more experienced teacher/advisors can help allay fears and provide wonderful coaching opportunities. Advisors must set reasonable parameters for student dialogue. In addition, advisors must understand when and how to make appropriate and necessary referrals to the school counselor, social worker, school nurse or substance awareness coordinator if sensitive information is revealed.

Parents and guardians need to understand the purpose of advisory. The first stop on back-to-school night should be meeting with their child’s advisor. Schools can use this time to engage parents in a simulated advisory session or advocacy exercise. Every effort should be made to keep parents informed of advisory themes and projects.

So, why should you implement an advisory program in your school? According to Nancy Doda, a respected expert in middle level education and one of the designers of Schools to Watch, “Advisory...is our commitment to creating caring schools.... If we embrace advisory...as a powerful opportunity to enhance our efforts to reach and teach our young people, then affect and achievement become codependent and no middle school should be without it.”

Thanks to Jaynellen Behre Jenkins, past president NJMSA, for her contribution to this article.



Social Equity and Student Behavior: Finding Alternatives to Suspension

In the book *If You Don't Feed the Teachers, They Eat the Students*, Neila A. Connors wrote: "Every day, students from all walks of life arrive at school hoping they will be safe, fed, and assisted in realizing dreams.... To ensure that teachers are supportive of all students, we must create professional, safe, secure, and encouraging environments where everyone feels appreciated, listened to, and respected."

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) requires each district board of education to develop, adopt, and implement a code of student conduct which establishes standards, policies, and procedures for positive student development and student behavioral expectations on school grounds, including on school buses or at school-sponsored functions, and, as appropriate, for conduct away from school grounds (*N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.1*). The code of conduct serves to support the school in its mission to ensure that all students have a safe and civil place in which to learn.

When students are suspended, they are excluded from appropriate instructional environments and their ability to learn is compromised. High suspension rates and disparities among subgroups signal an over-reliance on negative discipline policies. The New Jersey Schools to Watch application process requires schools to analyze and discuss suspension data. If a school's rate of suspension is high, or there is an overrepresentation of particular subgroups in the data, this information should "ignite" conversations within the school community about discipline policies.

Suspension rates and subgroup disparities may be positively impacted by the implementation of proactive discipline policies. Proactive discipline policies and interventions require a shared vision that commits to a clear, fair, and consistent multi-faceted approach. Faculty, staff, and students should be trained to be mediators and to work to "de-escalate" potential conflicts.

Behavior interventions might include counseling, mediation, and character education, as well as a school-wide focus on developing students' problem-solving skills. Other strategies might include alternate short- or long-term scheduling for students and a commitment to parent and community involvement to establish and implement positive discipline interventions. Implementing positive discipline policies at the classroom and

team levels, as well as throughout the school, can ensure a consistent as well as individualized response to negative behaviors. Positive discipline policies, as opposed to punitive and exclusionary discipline practices such as suspension, work to prevent problems and change student behavior.

The Social Equity Challenge: Equity and Access for All

Social equity demands experienced and expertly prepared teachers, a commitment to high expectations and high-quality work, respect for diverse cultures, community engagement, and the exclusion of gender and racial bias. High-performing schools are places where all students are able to grow, learn, and succeed!

The New Jersey Schools to Watch application process requires that schools disaggregate and analyze discipline and suspension data. Schools are asked to take a critical look at school discipline policies and practices. The reason for this is simple. A core social equity component focuses on a school's discipline and anti-discrimination policies. While it is mandated by the Department of Education's Comprehensive Equity Plan to have these policies, there are related questions to be asked to see if a school measures up.

- Do school policies include programs that encourage students and parents to value diversity?
- Is the school's grievance procedure publicized for the resolution of discrimination complaints?
- Are issues of equity a part of the regular curriculum, as appropriate?
- Do teachers represent the rich diversity of the school's population?
- Do teachers positively reinforce students' abilities and interests regardless of a student's ethnicity?
- Are communications and usage of mannerisms consistent with all students?
- Do teachers have personal contact with all parents to discuss student progress?
- Are classroom management techniques effective and do they cultivate the prevention of discipline problems?
- Do teachers establish behavior management rules for the classroom early in the year? Are those rules consistently and fairly applied?
- Are teachers respectful and do they emulate a good balance of discipline and humor with the students?
- Do teachers compliment each student at least once a day?

Remember: It's not what you teach, but how you teach it that makes all the difference in maintaining inclusion, enthusiasm, attention, and participation from students.

Thanks to Mary Conrad, NJDOE Office of Equity and Dr. Kelly McNeal, William Paterson University, for their contributions to this article.



Teacher Leadership: A Key to Successful Middle Schools

Teacher leadership is the single most essential element for promoting long-term sustainable success with virtually any of the organizational reforms that go into creating high-performing middle schools. Top-down traditional leadership can create the illusion of a middle school *form*, but only a web of shared and widely distributed leadership within the professional staff can bring about the *substance* of a dynamic, self-renewing, accountable, and effective educational experience for our students. For shared leadership to take root and thrive in a middle school, it requires an organizational commitment to creating a collaborative culture, significant training for everyone involved, authentic opportunities for teachers to play leadership roles, and structures that enable and support the necessary practices.

Organizational commitment means that formal leaders, both in the school and at the district level, are ready and willing to allow teachers to fully participate in decision-making, especially when it comes to anything that potentially impacts on instruction and student learning. It also means that teachers are ready and willing to constructively and respectfully work together with their colleagues and administrators in the honest and transparent examination of current practices and structures and to make decisions regarding the changes that are necessary to improve student learning and performance and to create a school culture and climate that is reflective, courageous, respectful, blameless, and positive--a culture that allows everyone to thrive.

The “will” to share leadership, however, is not enough. People must also have the skills and dispositions to take advantage of the opportunities. This means that everyone interested in participating in collaborative leadership needs extensive and ongoing training. This training should address personal skills (managing one’s self), interpersonal skills (especially working with others in teams), and strategic skills (deciding, planning and implementing strategies), as well as focusing everyone on collecting and analyzing data for the purpose of informing the significant decisions that need to be made. Within these categories there are myriad specific and discreet skills that need to be learned, practiced, and continuously improved upon.

For teacher leadership to make any real difference in the organization, there must be many authentic opportunities, both formal and informal, both long- and short-term, for staff members to provide leadership. The possibilities are endless and limited only by the

imagination and willingness of staff members to become involved. These opportunities can include, but are certainly not limited to:

- Facilitating and participating on instructional teams;
- Mentoring other teachers;
- Coordinating school events;
- Designing curriculum;
- Designing professional development and training for colleagues;
- Facilitating data collection and analysis teams; and
- Leading faculty discussions.

Finally, for shared leadership to work well, structures must be in place that support rather than inhibit participatory planning. First and foremost, this means that schedules must provide time for professional reflection and dialogue. If people don't have time to collaborate, they won't. All the best intentions will flounder without adequate common planning periods, faculty meetings that focus on real professional reflection, dialogue, and decision-making. It is also important to establish a leadership library, create ongoing leadership committees, and communicate effectively through a leadership newsletter. In fact, every school structure should be examined for its impact on leadership and be redesigned to support shared leadership.

Shared leadership, if done well, will energize and propel your middle school to continuous improvement in every aspect of the organization. Without it you will simply "spin your wheels" and flop from one failed practice to another. If done right, it is the surest way to energize and harness the power of the school staff to create the very best education for your students.

This article has been adapted by Arthur Firestone from the soon to be published book [Emergence, Convergence, and Discovery, A Pathway to Distributed Leadership in Schools](#), by Arthur Firestone and Sharon McCarthy.

Many things can wait. Children cannot. Today their bones are being formed, their blood is being made, their senses are being developed. To them we cannot say "tomorrow."

Their Name is Today. – Gabriela Mistral
(Chilean teacher 1899 - 1957)

Teachers teach because they care. Teaching young people is what they do best. It requires long hours, patience, and care.

--Horace Mann

Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young.

--Henry Ford



Hot Topics, Resources, Professional Development, and Best Practices

Do you have a resource for middle grades students that you would like to share with others? A favorite Web site or project? Tell us about it! E-mail your ideas and suggestions to: NJSTWapps@doe.state.nj.us. Be sure to include your name, school and the grade/content area you teach, and your email address. We may feature your great ideas, tips, and resources in our next newsletter!

Resources: New Jersey Schools to Watch Applications
Due October 15, 2008
<http://www.nj.gov/education/dsis/stw/hpmgs.htm>

New Jersey Resources for Middle Grades
<http://stwresources.pbwiki.com/>

Hot Topics: New Jersey High School Redesign and Secondary Initiatives
<http://www.state.nj.us/education/ser/>

Professional Development

NMSA, Denver CO: October 30, 2008-November 1, 2008

NJMSA, Kean University: March 27, 2009

National Schools to Watch Conference, Washington, DC: June 25-27, 2009

Articles for Parents and Groups in Your Community from the NMSA

- *The Push/Pull of Growing Up* by Richard W. Riley
- *Living With and Teaching Young Adolescents: A Teacher's Perspective* by Rick Wormeli
- *What Does It Mean to be Thirteen?* by Chris Stevenson
- *Positive Paths for Young Adolescents* by Jean Schultz
- *Understanding and Appreciating the Wonder Years* by John H. Lounsbury
- *Exploring the 'Cusp Culture' Helps Adolescents Navigate the Way to Adulthood* by Judith Baenen
- *Technology Tips for Parents*
- *Health & Young Adolescents*